

A Region of Sharp Contrasts

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Last week I had a presentation by Ken Billingsley of the Northern Virginia Regional Commission on the incredible changes that have taken place in our region since the 1990 census. Quite obviously, we have grown. The population of Northern Virginia that was 1.466 million in 1990 grew to 1.815 million in 2000. Projections are that we will reach 2.224 million by 2010 and 2.436 million by 2020. The region will be averaging almost 41,000 persons per year growth in the region.

There are sharp contrasts within the region with the most evident being between Alexandria City and Loudoun County. In Loudoun County 75 percent of households have a family rather than a single person living in them; in Alexandria the same is true in only 45 percent of households. Sixty percent of the households in Alexandria are rentals while only 21 percent in Loudoun are rentals. The percent of population 19 years and under in Alexandria is 18; in Loudoun it is 31 percent. Reston falls in the middle of these two extremes.

The contrasts extend to comparing the region to the rest of the country. The median family income of \$97,225 in Falls Church City and \$92,146 in Fairfax County are the top two median family incomes among the 3,141 counties and cities in the country. The average median family income in the United States is \$50,046. Fairfax County is ranked seventh nationally among counties and cities that have household incomes over \$150,000. The percentage in Fairfax County is 16.6 compared to the national percentage of 4.6.

The residents of our region are extremely well educated. Nationally, 24.4 percent of the population has college degrees. The percentage by some of the jurisdictions in Northern Virginia with their rank are Falls Church, 63.7 percent, rank 1; Arlington, 60.2 percent, rank 3; Fairfax, 54.8 percent, rank 5; Alexandria, 54.3 percent, rank 7; and Loudoun, 47.2 percent, rank 24.

In further contrast on an educational level, 8.9 percent of the population of the country has advanced degrees. In Falls Church, 33.8 percent have advanced degrees, second highest in the country. In Fairfax County, 24.4 percent have advanced degrees, eighth in the country.

The region has undergone a significant racial and ethnic transformation. In 1980 the population of Northern Virginia was about 17 percent minority; by 2000 that number had increased to 35 percent. The City of Alexandria's population is 43 percent minority making it the part of the region that is likely to become the first minority-majority community in the area. Fairfax County's population is just over 35 percent minority. In Loudoun the percentage is 20.

Politically, the inner suburbs elect some of the most liberal members of the General Assembly. The outer regions of Northern Virginia elect the most conservative members. There is sometimes talk of the "State of Northern Virginia." Clearly the region is exceptional by most national standards. Equally as clear is that it is not the homogenous region some would have us believe.